



## Grow Wisconsin Dairy 30x20: Myth vs. Reality

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**EDITOR NOTE:** This is a guest column from Secretary Ben Brancel regarding the Grow Wisconsin Dairy 30x20 Initiative.



MADISON- More than a month after Governor Scott Walker launched the Grow Wisconsin Dairy 30x20 initiative there still seems to be some confusion and misinformation going around on what this initiative is all about. Yes, we would like to “achieve an annual milk production of 30 billion pounds by 2020” as the Governor said in his news release dated March 13, 2012 but he also said this. “The goal of the Grow Wisconsin Dairy 30x20 program is to improve the long-term viability of Wisconsin’s dairy industry through services ... to meet the growing demand of the marketplace”. That has been the goal since day one.

The Grow Wisconsin Dairy 30x20 Initiative is not simply adding “another 1,000 cows” to a farm as some have implied. It is a program offering public and private services to farmers, whether they are long time operators or just getting started, that will help them decide on solutions to be more efficient, add value to their operations and improve their profitability. That may mean some farmers will expand, but others may turn to grazing, begin organic certification, improve herd health and per cow production or transition the farm from one generation to the next. From the very beginning we have made it clear that Grow Wisconsin Dairy 30x20 is ready to assist every dairy farmer no matter the size of the farm or the method of farming. Our overall objective is to help every individual who wants to dairy be profitable. Every profitable farm means milk for the future to meet the 30 billion pound goal.

Dairy farmers are taking advantage of the program. So far, more than 140 people have contacted our Dairy 30x20 staff with various questions. We are currently reviewing 58 grant applications. But even after grants are awarded, dairy farmers can still call or email to find the resources they need to make their operations more profitable.

Another point that seems to have gotten lost is that there is a demand for more milk here in Wisconsin. That may not be true for the nation’s supply as a whole but the demand for milk by our Wisconsin dairy product processors is great because our processors are innovative in product development and successfully looking to the marketplace both domestically and abroad for sales.

Before the program was launched, we sat down with state dairy farmers and processors to find out what they needed to be more profitable and sustain long-term production. We discovered Wisconsin dairy farmers are only supplying 90% of the milk needed to produce the high quality cheeses this state is known for. The dairy processing industry invested more than \$80-million in modernization and expansion last year and with more planned this year, plus new cheese plants coming on line, the demand for fresh, high quality Wisconsin milk will be even greater.

Anyone who follows milk prices knows there will be fluctuations during the eight year goal we set of reaching 30-billion pounds of milk. At the federal level, Congress has begun its debate on the next Farm Bill and while we don’t know the outcome, hopefully our elected officials will recognize the need for a market-oriented policy that encourages sustainable economic growth in the agricultural industry both now and long into the future.

In the meantime, at the state level, we have to focus on what we can do to position our industry to be successful. Currently, Wisconsin’s cheese production accounts for 25% of the marketplace. If we drop below that spot, others will step in to fill the void and it will be difficult to regain that market share. One only has to look at other regions of the country to know what could happen to our dairy

industry if infrastructure is allowed to crumble – there will be fewer buyers of milk and fewer suppliers of services needed by our dairy farmers.

So, with an eye to increased profitability and long term sustained production, no matter the type or size of farm, we encourage dairy farmers to call the toll free number, 855-WIDAIRY (855-943-2479) or email us here at DATCP [GrowWisconsinDairy@wi.gov](mailto:GrowWisconsinDairy@wi.gov) and discover the resources that are available to help keep their operation profitable and Wisconsin's dairy industry strong and proud.

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